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## Meeting a Monk

Questions about meeting a Buddhist Monk.....

In the past two years, there have been many surprises in Farmington, MO. Not least was the arrival at the local Walmart of a 6ft high Scottish American Buddhist monk shopping in the aisles. Now most folks didn't say much but it was obvious that many people wondered what the monk was doing here? More than that, why did he look like he did and act like he does? Other people have asked why monks do this and that, or why they behave this or that way, or what do certain things mean?

There is much we do not understand about Buddhist monks in our society and if we understood it would make a difference. As we study and support Bhante Vimalaramsi in the development of the center we learn more and more. Maybe it's time to have a place to ask these questions and get the answers we seek. Hopefully these pages will help. I encourage you to send questions in to us.email to: [sisterkhema@dhammasukha.org](mailto:sisterkhema@dhammasukha.org) your questions. Please post subject line as: questions about monks.

## KK QUESTIONS

- **Why does a monk wear robes?**A monk owns nothing. All worldly possessions have been given away. He is allowed to have his requisites only which are Food, Shelter, Clothing, and Medicine. Traditionally, the material for robes was taken from the shroud cloths of the dead and then cleaned and dyed with the juice of a Jack fruit. It was then left in a cave to season till it turned the bright color of orange. It was then retrieved and worn until it fell apart.
- **Why does a monk not usually shake hands?**Every person has their own energy. When a monk practices the meditation they get very sensitive. They do not want to pick up others energy. Usually they will not shake hands at all. Sometimes a monk will shake hands with a man. But they cannot shake hands with a woman. They live forsaking all sensual pleasures and to touch female energy could lead to desire. So they do not shake hand with a woman and a nun does not shake hands with a man.
- **Why don't monks ever touch a woman?**Explained above. Also a nun does not touch a man for the same reasons.
- **Why doesn't a monk say thank you?**Generosity is a prerequisite to successful practice of meditation. Pure Generosity receives nothing back in return for the deed. It holds a very high form of merit for the person who gives with a totally open heart. If I give you something and you give me back something I have received something in return. This would make your deed contain less merit. This is why a monk will not say thank you. He would be giving you something in return. He might bless the food you give, or give a blessing of some kind for an special event in your family, but many times he will not say thank you so that YOU can receive the full merit of the deed you

did.

- **Why do monks only eat once a day?** Monks live by a code of 252 rules of conduct. One of the rules is that monks cannot eat solid food after 12 noon. It evolved that the monks would go on Alms rounds to get food given to them in their bowls from about 10-11. They would eat from 11-12. Then they would rest for one hour and then return to practicing the meditation again. They can eat a light early breakfast but most prefer to just eat one meal at 11 AM. When they are in a country where Alms rounds are not a custom or understood, then lay people take turns cooking meals for the monks at a center and serving them as Dana. There were specific directions about eating that were given by the Buddha for good health and not too much heaviness after a meal so that they could do well with the meditation.
- **What is the job of a monk?** A monk has one job and that is keep alive the teachings of the Buddha and to train others to understand and succeed down the Noble8-Fold Path. The monk is concerned for the welfare of all people and is responsible to help them in any way to attain merit during their lifetime by giving them proper instruction.
- **Where do monks live?** Shelter is provided to a monk at a monastery, a retreat center, or in a solitary hut on a piece of secluded land. If he is where other people are in a house, he will be where he can have his own room and area away from people. A monk lives in a very solitary way. They meet with lay people and students to give blessings and instructions only. They do not socialize as other people do. They do supportive things to help people do charitable works and instruct people how to deal better with any kind of suffering in their lives by learning meditation and then seeing for themselves HOW the suffering actually occurs.
- **What does an assistant for a monk do?** In order to live in this world today, there are obviously things that have to be done that were not allowed to be done within the rules or the Vinaya. Things like handling money, planning events and classes, buying of clothing, communicating with the lay people to get things done have to be done by someone for the monk. Usually, a kappiya, as the assistant is called performs these tasks for the monk. Below is a response to a lay person desiring to understand about what a Kappiya does. In a highly populated area, a monk/nun might have several kappiyas and not just one in order to get things done.
- **What is a Kappiya?** Recently, someone emailed Bhante with a request to explain this responsibility since they had been asked to become a Kappiya for a close friend or relative who was going to be ordained. His reply was as follows:

If asked to be a "Kappiya" for a new monk, this is a very noble and good thing for you to do! There are so many things that monks can't do for themselves like preparing their own food etc. so there is a need for assistance. Being a Kappiya means that you need to offer him any requisites necessary - whether you buy them for him yourself or arrange with others to help is up to you. The requisites are 4 food, robes, lodging and medicine. In this way the monk doesn't have to handle money. By being a Kappiya it means that the monk can ask you directly for a requisite when he has need. The Kappiya is the only person who the monk can ask for things directly. And just because the monk asks doesn't mean that you personally have to provide it, many times other people want to practice their generosity but don't know what to give.

The Kappiya can suggest things to them.

Being the Kappiya can be as big or small a responsibility as they want to take, Sometimes a monk may have many Kappiyas, especially if it is a large Sangha, but he depends mostly on one or two of them for most things. Before I became a monk I was a Kappiya to Sayadaw U Silananda for two years. I lived in the monastery and prepared any food, and offered it to Sayadaw. Because I was living at the monastery I made sure that I went out and bought some food everyday and offered it.

**Being his Kappiya meant that I knew what Sayadaw's favorite things to eat were. I hope this is of some help you.**

**If there are any questions please about Monks and you would like an answer, please feel free to write an email to me."**

**Bhante Vimalaramsi**

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